

Epiphany 2: The Baptism of our Lord – Year A January 13, 2007  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Matthew 3:13-17  
Pastor Paul Horn

### Another sermon about baptism?!

*<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, “**Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.**” Then John consented. <sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

“When you get inside the door, please take off your shoes and hang up your jacket. I still see shoes on and a jacket lying on the floor. Feed the dog today. I still see an empty water dish and food dish! No running in and out of church! This is where we worship. Stop goofing around! People are trying to worship!” I am the parent. You are the child. You will listen and obey. Children often grow tired of hearing the same things repeated over and over again. But some things need to be repeated. As adults we grow tired of hearing the same things repeated over and over again, “Don’t forget to vote in the primary. Don’t forget to file your taxes. Back up those files on your computer! Don’t forget to get those W-2s out to your employers. Don’t forget to pay the bills this month.” Some things need to be repeated...

It’s been over three and a half years since you called me to be your pastor. An average preacher delivers 70 sermons a year. That’s about 250 sermons you’ve heard from me. You have heard the same basic theme repeated in those 250 sermons which goes, “You are sinners. Christ died for you. You will go and live for him.” I’m sure that from time to time you may have thought, “Here he goes again. We heard this story already. We’ve heard him quote this passage before. He’s spoken about this topic before.” In some cases I apologize for repeating illustrations and quoting the same passages. On the other hand, I’m not sorry at all. It’s necessary that I, as your shepherd, repeat these basic Scriptural truths. For one: **the Law**. God’s holy Law tells us what he demands of us. It shows us how miserably we have failed to keep those commandments. It shows us that we deserve God’s righteous wrath and punishment. Another theme that needs to be repeated is **the gospel**: the sweet truth that God sought you out and chose to save you, not based on anything you had done, but because of his love for you, and that he saved you by his Son’s perfect life and innocent death. What also needs to be repeated are the basic truths concerning **holy living**. After seeing Jesus’ love for you, you actually desire to walk the way he walked (go to worship and Bible class, to support the church, to honor authority). Christ’s love for you moves you to detest all sin – like casting your eyes on a puddle of vomit – yuck! Sin is gross!

There are other things that you have heard repeated from me and will continue to hear repeated – 1) the importance of **the Word**, 2) of **Baptism**, 3) and **the Lord’s Supper**.

Why do I repeat these themes? Because they are the Means of Grace; the tools the Holy Spirit uses to create saving faith and to sustain and strengthen saving faith. If it is my responsibility to make sure that you are strengthened in your faith and if you attend church regularly to grow in your knowledge of Jesus then I will continue to repeat these themes. I will repeat them because Scripture tells us that these are the **only** means that the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith. It's not surprising then, that today you will hear another sermon on Baptism. This morning we will explore the baptism of Jesus. First, we will explain why Jesus was baptized and what happened in the Jordan River that day. Then we will examine the significance of your baptism and why it is still important for you today.

We listen to Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, "<sup>13</sup> **Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.** <sup>14</sup> **But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'**" <sup>15</sup> **Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'** Then John consented." Here's what Martin Luther said about this, "**This is what John means when he says to the Lord, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' It is as if he were saying: I am a sinner, so I should rightly be receiving baptism from you, Lord, and thus be cleansed and absolved of sins by you. For he well knew that Christ had no sin and that it was he who was bearing the sins of the whole world, the only one to bring forgiveness and impart the Holy Spirit. That's why he says: 'I need to be baptized by you.'** (*Luther's Works, Vol. 51:317*).

Now, what did Jesus mean when he said, "**It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness?**" Jesus did not need baptism in that he had not sinned and had no reason to repent and have his sins washed away through baptism. But he says that he must do this to fulfill all righteousness. If someone lives righteously, then they are doing those things that God desires of them. Jesus will say later on in his ministry, "**I have come to do the will of him who sent me and finish his work.**" (John 4:34...*and throughout the gospel of John, Jesus is quoted as saying this.*) The Messiah had come to fulfill everything that God required of him and humankind. Only baptism is not and was never law. It does not demand nor is it something we do for God. Baptism is gospel because it is what God does for us and what he gives to us through the sacrament. All of God's righteous requirements were to be fulfilled in the Messiah. In essence Jesus was saying to John, "This is what my Father wants us to do, so baptize me."

<sup>16</sup> **As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.** In the Old Testament, Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 61:1 and Psalm 45:7,8, it was prophesied that the Messiah would be anointed, not with oil, as kings, priests and prophets were, but with the Holy Spirit. Here at the Jordan River, at his baptism, those prophecies are fulfilled. Jesus is anointed with power by the third person of the Holy Trinity, who appears physically in the form of a dove, a symbol of peace. It's not that the Holy Spirit had not been with him before, but now the Holy Spirit equips Jesus with the gifts that he would need to carry out his responsibility and office as the Christ (the title *Christ* means *the anointed one*).

And now the first person of the Trinity makes his way to the stage in grand fashion. The Father rends the sky and reveals heaven itself and speaks to John the Baptist and the people who stood on the banks of the Jordan with their jaws no doubt dropping to the ground, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** This was a way for the Father to publicly identify his Son as the one he had chosen to carry out his plan of salvation to save sinners from sin and death. Jesus officially began his public ministry here at the Jordan River. This does not mean that Jesus had done nothing for our salvation beforehand. Jesus had actively carried out the Father’s law from birth, with his circumcision eight days after birth, his dedication at the temple 40 days after birth and the sacrifices required by his mother, his attendance at the Passover, his obedience to his father and mother, his obedience to his heavenly Father as he sat in the temple discussing the Scriptures. Jesus would continue to actively do his Father’s will throughout his ministry. But starting now, his baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry and his passive obedience; his willingness to allow his life to be taken as the sacrifice for sins on the cross. **“With him I am well pleased.”**

The Father cannot say that about you and me, if he looks at us how we are from birth, disgusting, vile, wretched people, fully corrupted with sin and filled only with evil desires. This sinful nature drives us to trespass the Father’s posted laws, “Listen to and obey your parents, your pastor and the government. Don’t hold grudges. Forgive. Don’t be selfish and proud. Be humble. Think of others first and yourself last. Your iPod or Nintendo or computer or TV or your home are not what you should spend most of your time with. My Word is.” Because we have crossed the line, the Father says to you and me, “With you I am not well pleased.” This is why we all have a great need for baptism; babies, children and adults.

Through baptism the Father can say to you, “With you I am well pleased.” He couldn’t say that about us, not without Jesus. When he looks at what Christ did for you as your substitute, he can say that. “With you, I am well pleased, because my Son happily obeyed my laws, he lived the sin-free life you could not, he died the death you deserved, he rose from the tomb to conquer death, which would have held you captive forever, and now my Holy Spirit has given you my Son’s life and death and resurrection through baptism.” Just as Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, so also you were anointed with the Holy Spirit at your baptism. The Holy Spirit is present because God’s Word is present at baptism. Take the Word away and it’s just plain water. Add the Word of God, his all powerful, eternal Word, and the water is divine, living water.

This morning as we revisit your baptismal day, God’s Word reminds you that through this living water the Holy Spirit covered you with Christ’s blood which washed away your trespasses against the Father. Through the living waters of baptism the Holy Spirit buried your old naturally sinful self and raised to life a new person. Recommit yourselves today and everyday to live according to the baptismal grace that Christ poured out on you. Live according to the new person. Daily drown the old sinful person with his evil deeds and desires through repentance.

Remember your baptism everyday. Frame your baptism certificate and hang it on the wall so that you always see it. If you don't already have one of these baptism medallions, take one home today, and put it in your home or on your office desk where you will see it daily. When you see the font at church, when you see the sign of the cross made by your pastor, remember that sign was made over you at your baptism. Cherish that day the Holy Spirit anointed you with Christ's life, death and resurrection, cleansing you of all your sins and giving you the gift of eternal life in heaven. Discover the joy and comfort in your baptism daily, knowing that Jesus claimed you as his own through this wonderful Means of Grace. Speaking of cherishing victories...

Race car driver Jeff Gordon has won the NASCAR Cup Series four times, has 81 career NASCAR victories, and became number one on the all time wins list in 2007. But do you know what day he was heard saying these words, "This is the happiest day of my life!"? It was the day he stood triumphant, not on a race track, but in the waters of baptism (October 1994). Do you know why he said that on that day and on no other? It's because to him and all God's people through the water and the Word that all Christ won on the cross is given. You, therefore, claim victory over the grave and hell because Jesus claimed you in the water and the Word. And in the end should Jesus ask, "Why should you live with me forever?" You will triumphantly cry, "Because the waters of your baptism cover me!" May the Holy Spirit keep you in your baptismal grace all the days of your life. Amen.

Another quote from Luther....

**"Therefore, if you are asked what baptism is, you should not answer, as [some] do, that it is a handful of water, which is no good... But you should say: Baptism is... a divine and holy water because of God's commandment. ...Say that baptism is a living, saving water on account of the Word of God which is in it. The Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, sun, moon, and all angels. [Therefore,] don't look at the water, and see that it is [just] wet, but rather that it has with it the Word of God. It is a holy, living, heavenly, blessed water... or do you think it was a joke that the heavens were opened at Christ's baptism? [Matt. 3:16].**

**"Say, therefore, that baptism is water and God's Word comprehended in one. Take the Word away and it is the same water... which waters the cow; but with the Word, it is a living, holy, divine water. He who considers the words: "He who *believes and is baptized* will be saved" (Mark 16:16) will find [salvation]; for with His words, "will be saved," Christ puts salvation into baptism. Therefore it is impossible that this should be simple water when through it salvation, forgiveness of sins, and redemption from death and the devil is given." (Luther's Works, Vol. 51:183).**